

Testimony by:

Liane Leedom, M.D. on behalf of

The Connecticut Coalition for Child Development Education

<http://ct-coalition-for-child-development-education.org/>

Regarding:

SB 340, "An Act Concerning a Two-Generational School Readiness Plan."

The Connecticut Coalition for Child Development Education is an organization of concerned citizens, professionals and organizations that is working to encourage districts to provide Connecticut's high school students with education in the science of child development. Currently, only a small minority of high school students receive education regarding the science of early development and the needs of young children. Most of these students are young women who plan careers in early childhood education. Very few young women and even fewer young men receive any education regarding child development, yet over 85 percent of public school students will become parents.

Our Coalition asserts that the educational system has not kept up with scientific progress. Traditionally child development was taught as part of home economics and since this was a gendered course, the topic was not given due seriousness. More recently, in the last 25 years, the National Institutes of Health and the National Academy of Sciences have spent millions of dollars funding research into normative child development and the neuroscience of optimal human development. The findings from this research indicate that there are numerous practices that promote the healthy growth and development of children in all spheres of development: physical, cognitive and social-emotional. These findings have been incorporated into the curriculum of child development science courses in colleges and universities. Today's Family and Consumer Science teachers are qualified and ready to teach the subject of child development to Connecticut students.

Our Coalition believes that requiring a course on the science of child development during high school would greatly enhance student's scientific education as well as their life skills. Students readily engage in the topic of child development because they relate to it as human beings. This is one science course that students will engage in because it has meaning to their lives. Furthermore, emotional intelligence and relationship skills naturally improve due to the course. Our Coalition has developed a model curriculum that schools may use free of charge to develop their course work. The curriculum is found on our website.

We agree with the two generation approach of SB 340. We ask that the Bill be amended to include funding for districts to expand child development course offerings to high school students. We also ask that districts receiving this funding be provided with funding for researching the effectiveness of their curricula. Although it is laudable that this Bill attempts to reach low income parents who may not have graduated, would it not be equally prudent to reach students before they leave school and become parents?

In conclusion, Connecticut's future parents need education regarding the science of child development. Yet this important subject has been lost in the recent educational reforms. We advocate that the legislature provide incentives to districts for fixing this serious problem. Family and Consumer Science teachers are qualified and ready to teach the subject of child development to Connecticut students their programs require funding to accomplish this task. We believe that districts implementing child development education courses would realize great benefit and that the word of this benefit would spread. Thus dollars spent on pilot funding would be well used as pilot programs would lead to better education throughout the state.

Coalition Member Groups:

The State Commission on Children
The CT Parent Teacher Organization
The CT Association of Public School Superintendents
The CT Association for Infant Mental Health
The State Department of Children and Families
CT Voices for Children
CT Association of Youth Service Bureaus
Child Guidance Clinic of Central CT
The Mental Health Association of CT
CT Parenting Education Network
Coordinating Council for Children in Crisis
The CT Children's Trust Fund
Prevent Child Abuse Connecticut
Early Childhood Cabinet Blueprint
The Wallingford Visiting Nurses Association
The Wallingford Daycare Center
The Hyde Foundation

Also, more than 40 individuals including Yale child psychologist Edward Zigler and Yale child psychiatrists Kyle Pruett and James Comer.

The Coalition's work is supported by the James H. Napier Foundation and the William C. Graustein Memorial Fund.